

IN THE COUNTRY OF THE SNOWS

Entry No. 83 in Our Prize Story Competition

BY EILEEN MORETTA

ALL day the mercury in the bulb had been dropping. All day the lake had been groaning in travail,—“making ice,” the natives had it. It was both impressive and depressive, the muffled vibrations booming across the high pitched silences like the half smothered roars of some starving wild beast in the pains of wounds and hunger. The dogs had been frightened at first, and had barked and howled in unison. Sir Bedivere, the splendid St. Bernard, was country born; but the two years of his life had been passed in the effete ways of cities; and dainty Lady Babbie, the proud-pedigreed collie puppy, was only a few months up from Virginia. Sir Bedivere the venture-some had gone down to the lake, where the strange thing was concealed, and, ear to ice, listened gravely and inquiringly. He had then, in the way of dogs of much wisdom, communicated to his timid young companion on the bank that there was nothing to fear, and had eventually imbued her with his daring to the extent of a slippery frolic on the groaning ice.

From the doorway Maida had stood and watched them. It was the doorway of a summer bungalow, lovely in its season, and of much beauty, albeit of a bleak and lonely sort, in this midwinter of snows. The great pine sentinels stood impassively erect, and their uniforms were whiter than any pipe-clayed trappings of militant man. The silver birches shivered and shook in the late wintry sun; and the poplars—those ridiculous “popples,” with their bare, gaunt, long legs, to her the Clan-na-Gaels of the forest—stood stiff and stoical, like Scotsmen on parade. The garden, an exquisite life in summer, was a floral graveyard, and had the desolate look of all dead things, wrapped in its winding sheets of white, awaiting springtime resurrection. There were some translucent red berries in the hedge of tatarian honeysuckle, and she had scattered some crumbs about; but it was too cold for even the brave little brown chickadees to venture out. The red berries made a vivid splash of color,—the only one, save the magnificent copper lights of her hair, in the whole vast white and green expanse.

She let her eyes rest on the scarlet line: she had always loved color, and light, and warmth, and kaleidoscopic movement. Her inner vision pictured the city at this hour: The carriages would all be rolling homeward from the park, the ring of the horses' sharp-shod feet on the pavements mingling with the hard breathings of the motors, and the hurrying tread of the human thousands,—the grab toilers of the day, hastening to the metamorphosis that would transform them into butterflies of night. The electric bulbs would be sowing their blossoms by millions across the dusk, till the whole city was one riotous hotbed of color. Was it only a year ago that she had been a part—an enjoying, pulsing part—of this great Babylonian garden of bloom?

She had loved it all passionately; but she also had loved, though then unrecognized of it, with the other and unsuspected side of her many-fibered nature, this country of snows, its stern silences, the sigh of the winds as they swept like fates through the trees, the tang of the air when the frost bit deep, which was like wine to the blood. The city had claimed and held the pleasure loving, lotus dreaming side of her; but there was sterner fiber, bequeathed by grim old Puritan forebears ere they had met and crossed—never utterly merged—with the soft seductions of the South. Stephen Strong, M. D.,—the man, not the physician,—had detected these elements in her long before. “Adversity will fashion you,” he had said to her once in his usual direct way, “if she ever takes you in hand, into a wondrous being that will surprise the being you are now.” Ah, yes; but the fierceness of the fashioning, and the brutality of the hammer and anvil! It had been in the intolerable pain of it that she had turned to the Supreme Mother—Nature the nurse, the teacher, the friend—to find how well she loved her, and how dearly beloved was she in return.

And so she had shut herself up here among the great solitudes, closing the inner gates of her soul to the world, but opening them wide for the Mother of All, whose touch alone was tender enough to probe the wounds, the better to bind and heal. No one else would—could—ever know, save this all comprehending Mother and herself, and the God who had permitted the catastrophe to be.

SHE had seen the beautiful fabric of her married life,—or what she had dreamed, when she had married Phillip Lassard, that life would be,—which she had



She, This Woman, Had Said—

perseveringly, with the pathetic persistence of the woman clinging to her ideals, sought ever that it should be, torn asunder daily, trampled in the mire, spat upon. Ah! but it had been in reality only a tawdry thing at best! It had been only her dreams and high purposes that had ever made it, by sheer force of imagination and will, cloth o' gold. Yet, knowing this at last, she would still have patched and pieced the poor tinsel make-shift,—as women's hopes that are forever rainbow threads of mending ever do,—but with one blow he had utterly destroyed even the pitiful make-believe.

That blow! She shivered. He had struck her; had fairly rained blows upon her head, till all about her from dancing zigzags of blinding light had gone black. Yet it had been the horrible profanity, the unspeakable epithets, that had brought her staggering to her knees, and thence to her feet.

Dizzy, but with unwavering purpose, she had groped to the drawer where lay the revolver and, clutching it, had wheeled and leveled it fair at him. “Defile me with another word,” she had said, “and I will shoot you down for the beast that you are!” She had looked along

the barrel at him—sullen, cowed all at once—with eyes as resolute as had been her father's when he had charged the enemy and fallen at his regiment's head at Malvern Hill. And after a moment she had added, still holding her aim, “And since it is only at the pistol's point that I can longer exact decency from you, go, and never enter my presence again!”

AND in this fashion the fabric had fallen apart, a rotten network of lies—and worse. She shivered again; but the air was bitter as her thoughts, and she had been standing sometime. She called the dogs, and they came bounding to her. There was the usual jealous squabble, and then Sir Bedivere possessed himself of his preeminent corner of her gown, appropriated since earliest puppyhood, and escorted her with dignity indoors; little Babbie, pacified with an end of her long scarf, trotting proudly on the other side. Oh, they loved her! Her heart warmed. They loved her with the great, loyal love of dogs, unselfish, unbrinkable. And until one has known such, she thought, they have missed one of the great Compensations.

But she was of too healthy a mind to brood. Among her large pities for all humanity, all dumb animals, all the sad and somber fatalisms and cruel conditions of the thing called Life, there was no room for self pity. Had there been, all this world of old and patient wisdoms round her would have taught her better. From the forest giants, which had learned their lessons in other centuries, down to the veriest flower at their feet,—though it bloomed but for a season, fulfilled its destiny and died on the earth it had helped to beautify,—she drew her wisdom: to bend to the storm, but forever to seek the sun. The sun was sanity, was health, was the Law and Order of things. With doors and windows of heart and soul opened wide to it, self pities perished like sickly weeds.

She sat before the great open fireplace, a book on her knee, Sir Bedivere stretched in lazy abandon at her feet, the long, slim nose of the Lady Babbie against her gown. She was studying the inscription set in the fireplace, a conceit of her own:

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this genial friend.

The dogs, and the great ruddy heart of the fire, and, moving to and fro in the outer room, her broad back casting grotesque shadows on the firelit wall, the old serving woman, who would lay down her life, it need be, any day, for her,—these things counted. Ah! how well worth living was life, if one but sought and held fast to the “worth whiles” of it! She laughed softly, and the old black mummy came and stood in the doorway, gazing down at her with all her dark race's sensuous delight in beauty, and all the love and pride of actual ownership in it, that comes as a recompense to those who serve long and well. To her, this beautiful, rare bit of womanhood was, and had been from her cradle, and would be to her grave, just “Jill” Miss.

“Dese fireplaceries,” said she, “makes me jes’ natchally think ob some ob dese ‘spressions mah son Junius make one night when he late a gittin’ home. Atter Junius git to niggah-waitin’ at dat big Money-maker sto’, he sho gets mighty up-te-do. Bery techy ob he perquisitives, am Junius, whateber dose may be,—Junius am de greatest inclinationated at pickin’ up biggity words, an’ fire dem onto me to see whether dey kill or cure, Ah reckon. ‘Ah been here long ago,’ grumbles Junius, ‘ef it jes’ hadn’t been fo’ one woman fool dat come inter de cuffay after six ‘clock. She range herse’f up alongside de sizzlin’ steam regulator, an’ order icecream. Huh! it plumb erupticate me, to see dat idiot thing a stan’in’ dar a roasin’ ob her back ag’in’ de regulator, an’ a freezin’ all de front ob her wi’ icecream.” Her laugh rumbled out, deep and mellow, the beatific laugh of her race. “Dese’ de odder way ‘bout wi’ dese fireplaceries; but dey sure look homy. Bress mah soul!” she broke off suddenly. “Done heah dem sleigh bells? Who on earth am a tu’nin’ in heah?”

“Someone astray on the road, likely,” said Maida indolently. She stretched her arms above her head, basking luxuriantly in the warmth of the fire, as the old negro betook herself outside, with the peculiar roll of the African whose avoirdupois taxes the scales at over two hundred.

SHE did not heed Mam's surprised ejaculation; but she did hear her as she burst into the room, despite the encumbering bulk, exclaiming breathlessly, “Bress

mah soul, Lil' Mis! Why, it sure am Massa Stephen Strong!"

She sprang to her feet; but not so quickly that the man just outside in the white night of frozen things did not see, and photograph for all time upon the films of his memory the heart stirring picture, the adorable womanliness of it, that she had made before the fire.

"Oh," she cried, "I am glad! I did not know till you came," she stopped, then laughed with the abandon of a child, "how very much I wanted to see you." She held out both hands.

He gripped them hard for one long moment, the eyes of the physician keen, the eyes of the man—what clamed in the eyes of the man? As she began vaguely to question with an unaccountable hurry of heartbeats, the dominant forces of a sternly self commanded nature again assumed supremacy. He stooped to pat the head of Sir Bedivere, who was insistently demanding recognition. "I am glad I came," he said simply. No hint herein of the heart clamor, louder than that of his aristocratic clientele abandoned, which had driven him up and up into this white country for just one look into the face of this one woman out of a world of women.

Presently, sitting before the fire, he looked across at her with the dependable authority she had always found so satisfying. "Tell me all about it," he said quietly. "Or, no," he corrected gravely, "you could never tell all. Tell me what you can."

Almost it was uncanny, the sureness of that mental

touch that could lay its finger upon the pulse of one's inmost being, a physician of mind and soul as well as body. Quite naturally she found herself unfolding the sad and sorry little epic, almost as though she only rehearsed it to herself before the fire.

"It was inevitable, you see," she finished. "It began to be inevitable—"

"From the day you married him." Strong's eyes were on the fire. In the red spaces he seemed to see that passage up the aisle of old Saint James to the Mendelssohn music. She had been very young in her wedding array: no bridal veil had ever filmed a more glorious expectancy of beautiful girlhood. He shook himself together. "It began, rather," he frowned, "back in the blood of the hysteria haunted, drug addicted mother who bore him."

"Doctor," Maida spoke a little breathlessly, "there was some inheritance, then—"

"Nothing that he might not have overcome. Old Felix Lassard was virility itself, and came of a virile line. Strong men can overcome heredity. It is only the wilfully weak who shelter themselves behind 'the sins of the fathers.'"

"Yes; but," Maida spoke slowly, "the sins of the mothers—what of them?"

He did not seem to hear her. He was leaning forward, gazing with curious intentness at the quaint inscription on the clear, shining plate. "A pretty whimsy," he said. "Now is the winter of our—hum—discontent—" He had risen, as though better to decipher the lettering, and was leaning rather awkwardly over her as he read,

—"Made glorious summer by— Put down that gun!"

The words shot out like bullets; but over them had rung a report, the splinter of breaking glass, and in a chink of the wall above her head a bullet struck with a spiteful spit. She sprang up. Strong had wheeled, and faced the long glass doors at their back. He stood like a statue between her and them; but she felt, rather than saw, the sinister shadow outside.

"Open those doors!" There was something in the voice of this man who still stood in front of her that gripped her very soul. The words fell like sparks struck from white-hot steel. The eyes—she fancied that in them too blazed the compelling flame of molten metal.

Slowly the doors opened. She knew quite well who would be standing on the threshold; though the face, twisted and distorted, bore little semblance to the once handsome one of Philip Lassard. The wild eyes that looked out of it were fastened in a wide stare upon the man before her.

"Come in!"

Slowly, as though dragged by some unseen power, the man came into the room. The frost splintered air outside rushed through the doors. Up from the lake swept the muffled roar of the wild beast in pain, swelled, and broke, and died sullenly away.

"Put that gun on the table!"

Lassard had been clutching it at his side. With a curious jerk, like that of a vicious child who obeys with sullen longing to disobey, and a hate of the power it

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PUTTING SLAT THROUGH THE SIFTER

BY SEWELL FORD

WEIRD, ain't it, how they'll run bunched at times? Now, I was waitin' for Whitney Smythe. Eh? Ah, come, don't let on you never heard of Whitney! Well, that just shows! Never happened to bump up against him summers at Newport, or goin' over to the other side in December, or seen him strollin' down the Place de la Concord Grapes, or joined him at a game of bridge in the American Club at Rome? My, my! Some folks do stay at home a lot, though!

Me? Why, I've known Whitney ever since— Let's see, I think it was day before yesterday he drifted in here with a card from Mr. Purdy-Pell. Too bad I hadn't been warned over the 'phone beforehand, so I could have had a sidewalk canopy put up, and a red carpet laid over the steps, and the front office sprayed with l'Issoire Danube.

For of all the perfectly exquisite gents I've ever had in the Physical Culture Studio, this Smythe party was a little the squizziest. I happened to be back in the gym when he first shows up, and Swifty Joe comes in with his card, holdin' it edgewise between his fingers, like it was a pane of glass, and gawpin' at it with his brow furrowed up.

"M. Whitney Smy-the," says he, "an' I think he must be one of them Roasian Grand Dukes. Smy-the! What's that, anyway, Shorty?"

"Smith with a bank account," says I, yankin' away the pasteboard. "Grand Duke your grandmother!"

"Well, he looks it," says Swifty. "And for the love of Mike put a coat on before you go out! He's a swell."

"Think he'd faint if he saw me in my shirtsleeves?" says I. "Then we'll give him a chance."

But for once I was sorry I hadn't followed Swifty's directions. Whitney was some swollen, sure enough. His topaz stickpin matched his tie, and his tie matched his silk socks, and the narrow edge on his hanky matched both. You know—the kind that has embroidered monograms on their pajama sleeves and keeps fourteen pairs of custom made shoes in trees on the wardrobe shelf. His gray hair with that pompadour cut, and his pointed gray mustache gives him sort of a Frenchy, distinguished air too; and when he glances cold and critical at me in my work pants and mussed up shirt I felt like the hired man when he comes stompin' in from the barn and finds the minister makin' a call. I don't know whether he expected me to have on full evenin' dress or not; but that loo! of his was sure reprov'n'.

When he's presented his note from Purdy-Pell, though, and I've assured him that I'm the really truly Professor McCabe whose name is on the door, he forgives me far enough to state that he's called to arrange for a short course, just to keep him in trim until he goes abroad again.

"I see," says I. "About half an hour on the mat, and the other half jugglin' the mitts and acquirin' a few new pun-hes, eh?"

"No, no, not at all!" says he, patten' the air distressed with his hands. "Nothing like boxing; nothing so coarse and brutal as that, you know."

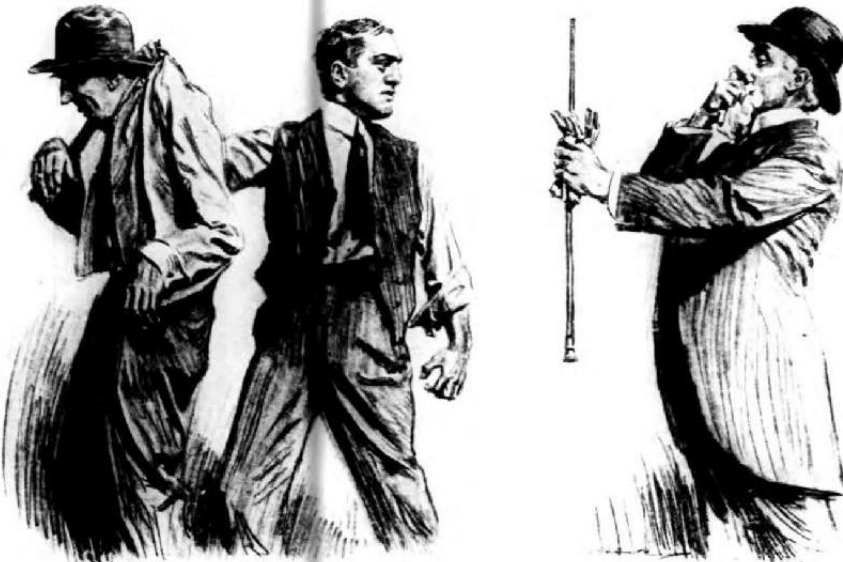
"Apparatus work, then," says I; "chest weights, rowin' machine, and so on, with some lively medicine ball stunts at the finish to lather you up well?"

"My dear fellow," says he, "you fail to get me. I do not wish to—er—lather up. Ugh! In Rome, now, I have my fencing master. I suppose you do not—"

"Nix," says I. "No teeterin' round with overgrown crochet needles here. Nor we don't teach the minuet, nor do the Maypole dance. But I could have my assistant put you through the wand drill gentle. How about that?"

"Excellent!" says he. "But your assistant? You do not mean the person who ushered me in?"

"Sure," says I. "Swifty Joe Gallagher."



"Excuse Me," Says I. "A Piece of Wreckage Come In with the Tide."

"He wouldn't do at all," says Whitney, shudderin'. "I—I could not bear to look at him, you know. I must insist, Professor, on your personal attention."

"When I get down to the wands, Mr. Smythe," says I, "it comes high."

"The matter of expense does not interest me in the least," says Whitney, twistin' his mustache scornful. "Tomorrow, then, at ten A. M. Bon jour, Professor."

"Off widowshe," says I, comin' back at him with all the German I had in stock.

AND of course, Whitney bein' a friend of Purdy-Pell's, all I has to do to get his complete hist'ry is to ask Sadie about him when I get home. It ain't very thrillin'. He's an old bach cousin of Purdy-Pell's whose sole worry in life is tryin' to live up to his income. Seems the original pile was heaped up by a mean old uncle that wouldn't let him in the house while he was alive and willed all his dough to found a hospital; but Whitney's lawyers bust up that scheme, and the half they didn't grab was so well invested in some shoe machinery patent rights that he was soon in the plute class, and had been there ever since.

Early in the game Whitney mapped out this plan of summerin' at Newport and winterin' abroad, with a month or so in between knockin' around at his New York clubs, and he hadn't varied it for years. He wa'n't much of a sport, though. His main idea, it appears, was to get posted on art and music and books, and to sop up all the odd ends of culture there was layin' around loose.

"And it's really wonderful," says Sadie, "to hear him

talk about operas and paintings and French novels. He knows everything. Only, at times, he does get a little—"

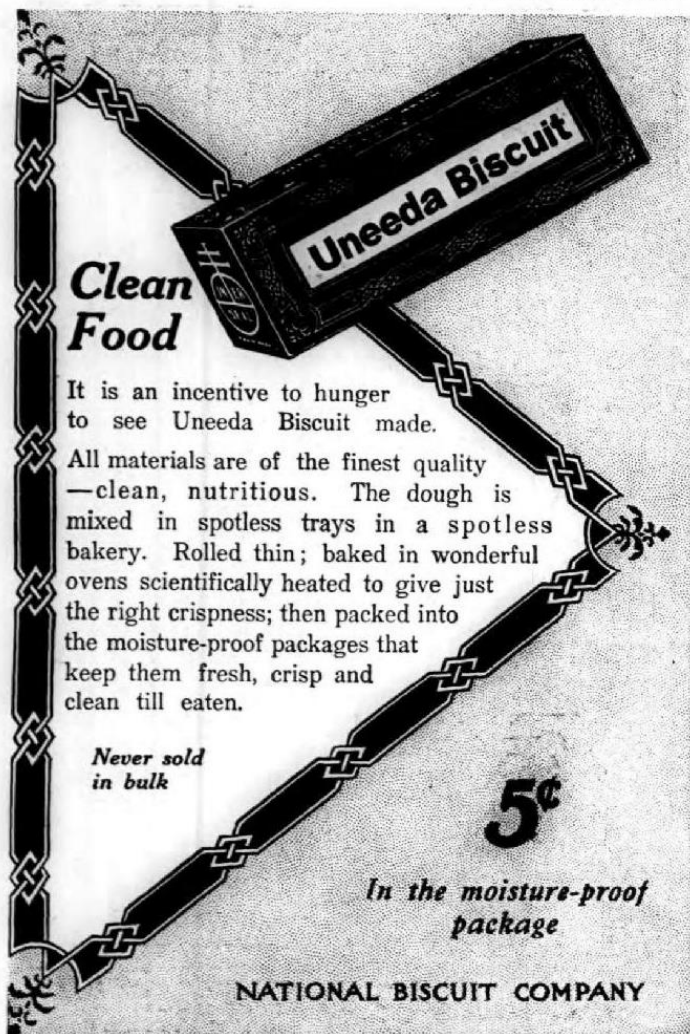
"Yes, I could guess that he might," says I. "But if I could induce him to put the gloves on once he'd discover a form of art that he'd overlooked. Wonder if I couldn't?"

SO there I was, with the front office all tidied up slick, plottin' things for Whitney; when in limps this bleary eyed object with the trembly lower jaw and the wabby knees. First off I couldn't think where I'd ever seen it before, and I was on the point of callin' Swifty to lug it out to the ashcan, when he gasps out husky:

"It's me, Sir. Don't you remember—Slat Tucker, from Monk's steak house?"

Course I remembered then. You couldn't very well forget Slat altogether if you'd ever got a good look at him once; for that long, peaked nose, and that retreatin' chin, and them blue-green pop eyes was a combination that was bound to linger, whether you wanted it to or not. I don't know which item it was about Slat's features that was most impressive, the prominent beak or the lack of chin. Anyway, his lower jaw slanted back most surprisin', and sort of faded into his long neck, like a turtle's.

As for the rest of him, he was all arms and legs, and just now he was as limp as six feet of loose clo'esline. You can guess that he wa'n't much of an ornament at his best; but with his red eyelids, and a two days' growth of grizzled stubble on his face, and his dinky



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crushed inside of the dead woman's neck there is the plain impress of a jewel setting. Now, come, Sedgwick—if I'm to help you in this, you must help me. You've been holding back something about that necklace. Had you ever seen it before?"

"Yes," was the reply, given with obvious difficulty.

"Where?"

"On the neck of the girl of my picture." Kent's fingers went to his ear, pulling at the lobe until that unoffending pendant stretched like rubber. "You're sure?" he asked.

"There couldn't be any mistake. The stones were matched rose-topazes; you wouldn't find half a dozen like it in the country."

Kent whistled, soft and long. "I'm afraid, my boy," he said at length, "I'm very much afraid that you'll have to tell me the whole story of the romance of the pictured face; and this time without reservation."

"That's what I've been guarding against,"

retorted the other. "It isn't a thing that I can tell, man to man. Don't you understand? Or," he added savagely, "do you misunderstand?"

"No, I don't misunderstand," answered Kent very gently. "I know there are things that can't be spoken,—not because they are shameful, but because they are sacred. Yet I've got to know about her. Here! I have it. As soon as I go, sit down and write it out for me, simply and fully, and send it to my hotel as soon as it is done. You can do that, can't you?"

"Yes, I can do that," decided Sedgwick, after some consideration.

"Good! Then give me some dinner. And let's forget this grisly thing for the time, and talk of the old days. What ever became of Harkness, do you know?"

Between them that evening was no further mention of the dead body in Dead Mens Cove.

To be continued next Sunday

IN THE COUNTRY OF THE SNOWS

Continued from page 6

dare not oppose, he raised the revolver and dropped it on the table.

"Now, you beast!" The icy quiet of the voice broke; the red-hot lava of a mighty fury seemed to pour hissing across it. A thousand whips of passion were lashing this man's soul. Sir Bedivere growled and bared his teeth.

Involuntarily Maida's clasped hands covered her eyes. They fell at the weird, uncanny sound, neither brute nor human, that was not from the dog. With that half snarl, half scream, Philip Lassard crumpled up weakly and fell at Strong's feet.

Instantly he was bending over him, the primitive man sunk in the scientist. He looked up at her almost humbly. "Forgive me!" he begged. "I lost myself. But—" he shot a glance up at that sinister hole in the wall, and then back to the beautiful head of this exquisite woman. "God!" he whispered tensely. "My— Call Mam!" he broke off brusquely. "We must get him to bed." His face was set to impassivity, and the mouth was one hard line. No further whirlwinds would shake the storm centers into outbreak.

Indeed, as he went deftly about the work in hand Maida watched him with growing wonder. Gravely quiet, yet keenly alert, of rapid resources and curt sentences—was this the man who— Verily, she must have dreamed it all! But this figure on the bed, this grotesque counterfeit of the dashing young cavalier who had won the romantic girl of her, was no dream. She noted the unkempt, long hair, the pallid, pasty skin, the dull, blank eyes. Then her gaze traveled to the arm hanging inert, punctured with those myriad blue marks that told their own degrading tale. A sick revulsion seized her, and she clung to the bedpost for support, trembling with a curious mixture of pity and nausea. She thought herself unnoticed; but almost with his back to her Dr. Strong spoke.

"You can do nothing," he said. "Go get some rest."

She pushed back the hair from her forehead with trembling fingers. "Rest!" she laughed unsteadily. "How could one rest—"

"But you must!" He lifted the arm hanging over the bed. "Presently he will—not be quiet like this. It will be no fit place for you. Mam, take her and put her to bed! See that she goes! Then you come back to me!" He let the arm fall and began busying himself with his medicine case. It was finality itself.

With an absurdly childish feeling, Maida suffered the old woman to lead her from the room.

Left alone, the doctor stood gazing down at the prostrate man. "Presently he will rouse and demand his dose," he muttered; "he will clamor for cocaine—anything. It will be a nauseating business. And this fiend is her husband! Even the angels in Heaven might doubt Omnipotence! And, of a surety," he remarked grimly, later, "no Jehovah had a hand in this. It must have been the devil himself who arranged the sorry vaudeville. His Majesty's jests are in damnable poor taste."

He flung up one arm sharply, as though to shut out from his sight this terrible thing of black and scarlet of which she suddenly seemed the incarnation. But her eyes held him; the fires within them blazed and held him fast.

"I love you!" called the eyes, and after a moment, "I love you!" spoke the lips.

A great cry burst from him. His arms flung out to reach her, to strain her to him, to feed the heart and soul that had starved so long for her, at her lips. He was terribly human, and—she had said she loved him! Between them there was only that wreckage on the bed. She was his by her own admission, by every straining fiber of the man clamoring for his mate. What mattered the thing called Honor, the ragged ethics of the world, the puerile laws of make believe that

tail all those things she had left untold. At thought of that rare womanhood, its pride and purity and passion of feeling, at the mercy of this Tiberius, the whole great manhood in him rose in revolt. He had kept his own life clean, that he might be worthy to hold her image in his heart. No unworthy thought had profaned the shrine wherein he had set her.

And yet this weak, vicious, unspeakable creature, who had alternately mouthed obscenity and raved curses through the night for his pitiful drug, had assailed her ears, bespattered her sensibilities, fouled the whole intangible gossamer fabric of that wondrous inner spirit of woman that no man, even clean of hands and gentle of thought, can hope to handle without soil! He set his teeth hard; but the groan of a soul in agony came through them. The vial of morphia that he held was well nigh crushed in his grasp.

As he turned to place it in the case, the sound of the curtains sliding across their rods arrested him. He paused, the bottle still in his hand.

Maida was standing between the curtains. She held them clenched in each hand. Her eyes were fixed upon the vial. "You could give him—all—of it!" she said.

He stared at her, the shock of her sudden presence stronger upon him than her words. She wore a loose gown of silk and lace, falling in sheer folds to her feet. Across its whiteness the wonder of her burnished hair shone its glory. If ever Beauty proclaimed itself, trumpet-tongued, it spoke in her,—her poise, her gaze, the whole warm, vital, intoxicating presence of her. Never was woman a more magnificent temptation.

Her words had conveyed no meaning. Only one dominant note went pulsing through the entire heart and fiber of him,—he loved her, loved her, loved her!

"You could give it to him!" she repeated clearly, and took a step forward, pausing just within his reach. "Why—don't you?"

Now her words struck! They beat into his consciousness at last. Hammering at his brain, they bit deeper and deeper. In the pregnant silence that held them both, each word seemed to shriek at him like a Fury, till he wondered if his nerves, strung taut, had snapped, and he had gone mad.

Then, of a sudden, a mighty wave swept over him. Others came crashing up and broke against his soul,—the allurements of her beauty, the greatness of his passion,—but the first submerging surge was one of horror. It struck him as the tidal wave strikes the swimmer, and the world about him went black. She, this woman,—the Woman,—for whom his reverence had been as illimitable as his adoration, she had said—Great God!

He flung up one arm sharply, as though to shut out from his sight this terrible thing of black and scarlet of which she suddenly seemed the incarnation. But her eyes held him; the fires within them blazed and held him fast.

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the Lilliputs of men laboriously constructed? Away with them all! There was but one Law, "They twain shall be as one flesh!"

Ah, but—there was one other! What of that God created thing called Conscience? Across the insane raptures of possible possession came the black nemesis that should lead to that inevitable moment when he could no longer stand upright and unashamed before his Inner Self. When that Self should see him sunk in the mire, his soul sinking in dark places, afraid to face its own tribunal! What love, though it soared high as Heaven, could compensate for that terrible day when before the judgment bar of his own conscience, he should utterly loathe—Himself?

For one delirious moment his whole being had rocked to the bliss of its possibilities; but Love was not enough! In every sane and healthy fiber of his being the truth swept over him, that Love was not greater than his soul, nor stronger than his self respect. With all the strength of his manhood he grasped the terrific temptation that had well nigh overmastered him, and with the iron of an indomitable will he nailed it to the Cross, though his whole racked and bleeding heart was crucified with it.

Without looking at the woman, he put the vial he held in the medicine case and closed the lid.

A VIBRANT cry struck across the stillness, a cry of many meanings. He turned at the sound. Maida had fallen on her knees; but her attitude was not of abasement. Her whole face was as one glorified. "Thank God!" she cried. "Oh, thank God!" The tears were running down her face; but her eyes were shining. "Forgive me!" she cried. "Oh, Stephen, it was an awful thing to do; but I had to know! He—had believed in him, once. I could not trust even the greatest of men—you—without a test. Oh, you will forgive me! I dared not trust again without!"

Only partly comprehending, he looked down at her. Her eyes were pleading as a child's; but the woman of her glowing radiant. "Oh," she cried, "I am so proud of you! With all my soul I can trust you—forever! Oh, if you had failed me, if you had loved me more than that greatness I adore in you, I think I should have died!"

She was trembling all over. He raised her gently. Holding her so, he looked down into her face. "It is I who should ask forgiveness," he said. "Oh, my queen among women, for one terrible moment my world turned to dust and ashes because I thought you meant it."

"You had to think that," she said simply, and would have moved away; but he still held her.

"Maida," he spoke gravely, "we are great enough for truth. You said you loved me. Was that but part of the test also?"

She looked at him fairly. "I said that I could trust you with my soul," she said. "I love you above all men! I adore and reverence you next to God!"

Once again those wonderful lights flashed up in his eyes. For one moment they stood, merged utterly; then he released her. He had not kissed her; but his whole mighty love had enwrapped her in an all-enveloping caress, which henceforth she should never miss throughout her life.

"Go now, heart of mine," he said. "Tomorrow—" he turned to the bed.

"Tomorrow?" Her eyes questioned him. It was the physician that answered. "I will take him to a sanatorium. He will linger for months, possibly a year, hardly more. His heart is very uncertain."

ON the morrow she stood and watched him drive away. The huddled figure beside him was sunk in apathy. At the bend in the road he turned and looked back, and she felt the caress in the long, long look.

Old Mam stood just behind her, watching the sleigh out of sight. "Dat ice 'bout cause its rambunctious," she said presently. "Time, too. Sech a foolishness! Come summer, it all melt up again."

"Come summer!" Her mistress smiled dreamily. "Ah, my heart—come summer!" She turned to the old woman with a wonderful smile. "Mam," she cried, "the most beautiful summer of all is the summer that comes—though late in coming—in the country of the snows!"

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